

SS Studies in Proverbs – “The Heart”

- **READ Proverbs 4:20-27**
- The theme of our study this morning is what Scripture refers to as **“The Heart.”**
- It is frequently used in the Word of God and the book of Proverbs!
- Here in chapter 4, within the verses we just read, **the son’s heart is of great concern to the father.**
- **Prior to this passage, and in previous chapters of Proverbs, the father has pleaded with his son to listen to his instructions and gain wisdom and understanding.**
- Here, in verse 20, the father seems to be **highlighting the importance** of his words.
- Can you hear him urging his son? He says, **“Be attentive,” “incline your ear to my sayings, i.e., listen closely,” and to keep his words within his heart (verse 21).**
- He then **stresses the importance and urgency of this matter** and explains why it is so important.
- He says in verse 23, **“Keep your heart with all vigilance!”**
- Another translation reads, **“ABOVE ALL ELSE, guard your heart.” WHY? “From it flows the springs of life.”** Other translations read, **“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life.”**
- The tone of these words conveys the **father’s love and deep concern for his son**. More than anything, the father wants his son to listen to, receive, and obey his instructions.
- We readily see the **“heart”** of the son is the father’s **central and immediate concern**.
- Our primary objective this morning is for us to look at the “heart” and consider the importance of it given in Proverbs!
- If the heart is important to the father in chapter four, and important to our Father in Heaven, then **it should be important to each and every one of us!**

Two Objectives

- **Two simple objectives:** I'd like us to consider why this father is so urgently concerned about his son's heart condition.
- Then, consider simply the duty the father gives the son, namely, **to guard the heart**.
- In hopes of accomplishing these objectives we will look at four areas of study related to the heart. This can be found broken out in today's handout. **They are:**

1. The Importance of the Heart
2. The Problem of the Heart
3. The Solution for the Heart
4. The Duty to guard the Heart

I. The Importance of the "Heart" – "Above all else"

- Before we go too far, we should ask what **Proverbs, indeed all of Scripture, mean when it refers to the "heart."** Ask class.
- In Proverbs, the word "heart" is used very broadly. It can refer to a **person's desires, emotions, will, behavior, personality, and, to some degree, intellect**. We can call it the inner man!
- Scripture speaks of a **joyful and merry heart**, a **sad heart**, a **wise heart**, a **trusting heart**, a **hard heart**, a **wicked** and **proud heart**. The adjectives and descriptors go on and on. I have listed just a few on the handout.
- The point is that the heart is **broadly used as the source of a wide range of thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors.**
- **Do you ever ask yourself?**
- **Why did I angrily yell at my spouse, children, siblings, and employees the other day?**
- **Why did I envy so and so because he or she received a promotion and not me?**
- **Why did I lust in my heart when watching that TV show last night?**
- We could, of course, go on and on. **The reason God's Word teaches us is the condition of the heart!!!**

- In explaining to his disciples the **root cause of a person's words and actions**, the Lord Jesus teaches them, and us, to **consider the vital importance of "the heart."**
- In Matthew 15, the Pharisees complained to Jesus because the disciples didn't follow the **expected tradition** and **didn't wash their hands before eating**. Jesus rebuked **the Pharisees** because they were more concerned about the outer man than the inner man.

Starting in Matthew 15:16 - Are you also still without understanding? ¹⁷ Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? ¹⁸ But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. ¹⁹ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. ²⁰ These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone."

- Whether it is word or deed, the source, or we might say the **starting point of what is said and done, stems in the "heart". The heart chooses its course of action!**
- These words of Jesus sound similar to Solomon's words in Proverbs chapter 4!
- Jesus was concerned about the condition of the heart, **as he is today with each of our hearts. For out of that heart flows the "issues of life."**
- In summary, the word **"heart" in Proverbs is used metaphorically to describe our inner person**—who we are, the core of our being, the seat of our desires and passions.
- I like the way one commentator that I read puts it. He wrote that the **"heart is the citadel (fortress) of man, the seat of his dearest treasure."** Thinking, emotion, intellect, personality, and will are all associated in Scripture with the "heart."
- With that in mind, it is no wonder the caring father in Proverbs 4 warns his son above all else to **"keep, or guard, his heart."**
- It is also no wonder that later in the Proverbs, the **father pleads with the son to give him his "heart."**
- Proverbs 23:26 – He says, **"My son, give me your heart and let your eyes observe my ways."**
- So, based on Jesus' words and the wise Father's words in the Proverbs, **the condition of our hearts is a key component of how we live. We cannot minimize the importance of the heart!**

II. The Problem of the “Heart”

- Now, along with the **importance of the heart**, it’s also a central theme in Proverbs, and really all the Word of God, **that teaches us there is a problem with the heart of man.**
- In fact, it is a **huge problem that each and every one of us faces!**
- King Solomon recognized this, **and anyone who has lived as a Christian knows it all too well.**
- In fact, I suggest the father is so concerned about his son because of this problem!
- **What is the problem (ask the class)? Fallen nature of man. Sin is in the heart!**
- Turn please to Proverbs chapter 20 READ PROVERBS 20:7-9
- “Who can say, “I have cleansed my heart?” pure; I am clean from sin”? **QUESTION to class.** What is the answer?
- It is a rhetorical question with an obvious answer! NO ONE!
- It is wonderfully assuring to see how the Proverbs are practical and realistic. **Verse 9 seems to qualify** verses 7 and 8.

V7: “The righteous who walks in his integrity blessed are his children after him. V8 A king who sits on the throne of judgment winnows all evil with his eyes. 9) Who can say, “I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin”?”
- Does a **righteous man walk 100% in his integrity and lead a blameless life?**
- Is he or she without sin? NO! Can even the very best and the holiest of earthly Kings “remove all evil with his eyes?”
- Of course NOT! **The answer to that question is verse 9 itself** “Who can say I have made my heart pure; I am clean and without sin”?
- Verse **9 tempers or qualifies** the statements made in Verse 7 and 8!
- Proverbs is, above all, practical. Solomon would never say the righteous never fall that they never sin! No doubt he would have known of his own father David’s fall into murder and adultery!

- **This is, of course, the teaching of the NEW TESTAMENT I John 1:8 – “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”**
- The problem, of course, **is our fallen and sinful nature**. Sin in the heart causes even a righteous person to experience trials and struggles.
- The apostle writes in the NT Romans 3:23, **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”**
- While Proverbs often speaks of the “righteous” person, **it does NOT teach that the righteous are free from a sinful heart**—just the opposite, in fact.
- The realistic truth is that though the upright fall, perhaps even into grievous sin, **they get up. That is, they repent and turn back to God.** A wonderful Proverb suggests this truth.
- **Listen to Proverbs 24:16. READ the whole verse first: “For the righteous falls seven times, (what does he do?) Does he give up? Does he quit? NO!”**
- **“He rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.”**
- **We are ALL prone to sin. In the words of the hymn writer: “PRONE to Wander Lord, I feel it; PRONE to leave the God I love!!”**
- Perhaps the classic OT passage on this is **Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it? That is another rhetorical question.**
- **Once again, the obvious answer is NO ONE! Only it is the LORD who “searches the hearts and examines the minds” Jer. 10:17**

III. The Solution for the “Heart”

- **So, we need a solution for the sinful heart, and we need it very badly!**
- **What is it that Proverbs tells us we need?**
- **The answer given in the Proverbs is Wisdom! The answer is a practical application of Wisdom!**
- I am afraid the **word wisdom in our society** is **not really very close** to the Biblical meaning of wisdom.
- The first entry in the **Merriam-Webster Dictionary** for wisdom reads as follows: **“accumulated philosophic or scientific learning. The second entry is Knowledge.**

- That is **NOT the ancient Hebrew mindset and not how wisdom is defined in the Word of God.**
- Certainly, one can learn, have great knowledge, be intelligent, and have a high IQ, but at the same time, **according to Scripture, be considered a “fool”!**
- The distinction between a wise person, as defined by God, and a fool, as defined by God, is that the **wise fear and trust in God.**
- Listen to how **Proverbs 9:10** puts it. **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”**
- But **Scripture** describes the “fool” in Psalm 14:1: **“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”**
- In **chapter 1** of Proverbs, we learn, **“Wisdom cries in the street and raises its voice in the markets, but the fool hates knowledge and will not choose the fear of the Lord.”**
- So, the urgent plea of the father in Proverbs, **and the solution, is for the son to choose Wisdom over folly.**
- That is the great choice that must be made in the **first nine chapters of Proverbs.** **Wisdom and Folly are both crying out loud for attention. Which one will the son choose?**
- It is the **same question we all face** today! **Will we choose the wisdom of God or will we choose the folly of sin?**
- **So, the solution for the heart is to fear (reverence for God) and put trust in the Lord.**
- The **activity of trust in God is central in the writings of the Proverbs.** **Those who have wisdom will have TRUST in God.**
- **Turn to Proverbs 22:17 – 19. READ it.**
- Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise,
and apply your heart to my knowledge,
¹⁸ for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you,
if all of them are ready on your lips.
¹⁹ **That your trust may be in the LORD,**
I have made them known to you today, even to you.

- **“Incline your ear. NIV is much clearer! “Pay attention and listen.” How often that phrase is found in Proverbs! The words of caring parents!**
- **Wisdom, who is, in fact, the Lord Jesus Christ, is telling us in Proverbs to put our confidence in God. The basic meaning is to **confide in one**, to set one’s hope and confidence upon one.**
- **The sinful heart needs to trust in the Lord** for every aspect of life!

Pro 3:5	Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding
Pro 28:25	A greedy man stirs up strife, but the one who trusts in the LORD will be enriched.
Pro 29:25	The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe..
Pro 30:5	Every word of God proves true: he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Or those who put their trust in him.

- **We see that the LORD Jesus and His wisdom is the solution to the problem of the sinful heart.**
- **Listen to Proverbs 18:10: “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into and is safe.”**
- **The Lord Jesus is our strong tower, our refuge, our place of safety.**
- **The solution to the problem of the heart is the Lord Jesus Christ, our strong tower of safety, our great Redeemer, who is our wisdom and righteousness.**
- **That is what the apostle teaches us in the letter to the church in Corinth.**
- **I Corinthians 1:30: “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,**
- **Do we want the wisdom offered in the Proverbs? Put your trust and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.**
- **I believe this is the gospel revealed in the Proverbs. Just as the New Testament Gospels of our Lord Jesus Christ reveal mercy for those who confess and turn from sin, the Proverbs offer hope for those who trust in the Lord.**

- Perhaps **many Christians read the Proverbs as simply sound moral principles** for living! It is that, no doubt, but much more!
- **There is grace in the Proverbs!** The Lord and his mercy are found!
- **Listen to Proverbs 28:13: “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” (that is repentance)**
- So, the Proverbs give us hope and confidence that God has grace and mercy for those who trust in Him. God Himself is the solution, the refuge, the heart needs!
- **Proverbs 8:35 is Wisdom speaking “Whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord.”**
- Once again, the language and tone of the New Testament Gospel are found in the Proverbs! It sounds like the Savior saying in the gospel account, **“Whoever finds me finds life!”**
- In finding life, by the grace of God, we find a heart that now desires to do what is right in the eyes of the Lord.
- **Speaking of the heart, one writer said the “greatest difficulty in conversion is to win the heart to God and after conversion to keep it with him.”**
- The good news for us is that it is God who wins the heart, and it is God who is able to keep it for him! The good news is that the **Lord Jesus Christ is the personification of wisdom!** He alone is the solution for the heart!

IV. The duty to “Guard the Heart?”

- **Now we come to our last section, which I have called the “duty to guard the heart.”**
- In verse 23 of chapter four, the father gives a command to the son.
- It is a **command to anyone who names Christ as their Lord and Savior**. It is for all Christians! **“READ verse 23.**
- **“Keep your heart with all vigilance.”**
- This is the **language of sanctification—a fancy theological word that means growing and maturing as a believer in Christ.**
- Scripture always focuses on sanctification, **purification of the heart, renewal of the mind, and conformation to Christ’s Likeness.**

- The command in Proverbs 4, verse 23, is similar to what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. In I Corinthians 16:13, he writes, “**Be watchful, stand firm, act like men, be strong.**” Some translations have it, “**Be on your guard.**”
- In Proverbs 4:23, Solomon poetically compares man's heart to the “Springs of Life.”
- The picture this gives us is a **reservoir of fresh water**. Or perhaps a picture of a **mountain spring of water. Abundant and clean!**
- Some people **have wells on their property** that supply their homes with fresh water, While others get their water from a **public drinking water reservoir**.
- In either case, like the heart, it needs to be properly cared for and attended.
- Many **reservoirs in the United States are carefully guarded**. They have fences surrounding them and a guarded central gate. The reasons are obvious: to protect the water from anyone with devious ideas!
- Pipes **allow water to flow out** of the reservoir, ultimately **to a purification facility and then to people’s homes**.
- **Starting in verse 24, Proverbs describes the pipes leading to our hearts.** They are so important for guarding the heart.
- Like pipes running in and out of the reservoir, **what we say, what we look at, and what we do all impact our spiritual lives!**
- **If we are serious in the duty of guarding our hearts,** the writer of the Proverbs (who, of course, is the Holy Spirit) is telling us that our mouth, eyes, and feet must be given careful attention! They must be kept or guarded at all times!
- They reflect the condition of our heart! They can easily become the outlets of sin and, therefore, must be guarded!
- Starting with the mouth in VERSE 24

Put away from you **crooked speech**;
and put **devious talk** far from you.

- Does anyone doubt that what we say impacts our inner man? We all know how easy it is to say something we regret, something that offends or even hurts someone.
- Our words have a tremendous **impact on others** and on ourselves. Proverbs, and really all of Scripture, emphasizes **the importance of words!**

- Next, Proverbs 4 addresses the eyes in VERSE 25!

²⁵ **Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you.**

- How quickly we are tempted and fall into sin by just a simple glance at something! Lust, covetousness, evil desire, simply by looking at something that we have no business looking at it!
- **We live in such an evil generation.** We all need to guard our eyes. Entertainment, Internet, magazines, and on and on in our culture. All primed and ready to tempt the Christian.
- All one needs to do is stand in line at a grocery store checkout counter to realize how important it is to pay attention to the Proverbs.

Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you

- **It is that bad!** It doesn't take much to stumble in our devotion to God.
- Do we remember the event leading to King David's fall into adultery? What was he doing?
- **"One evening, David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof, he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful...."**
- How better it would have been for David if he **"Let his eyes look straight ahead and fixed his gaze** on anything other than that attractive lady!
- Jesus said in Matthew 6:22-23 **"The lamp of the body is the eye. If, therefore, your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness."**
- **The last "pipe" into the heart** that must be guarded in Proverbs 4 **is the feet!** Verse 26

²⁶ Ponder the **path of your feet**; then all your ways will be sure.²⁷ Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.

- We already mentioned from the Proverbs that the righteous run into their strong tower while the wicked rush into sin.
- **The reference to feet refers to a person's behavior,** lifestyle, and actions. When we are free to go wherever we want, where do we go? **What path do we take?**
- Do we follow the path of obedience, or do we follow the path of wickedness that leads to destruction? **We all must answer that question before God.**

- I want to **end our study** with one other aspect that is vital to the duty of guarding the heart.
- It is important to realize that we are NOT alone in our duty! In fact, Scripture makes clear that one of the important roles of the Holy Spirit is to assist us. He is the HELPER! What a wonderful name for the Holy Spirit. **We all need help, don't we?**
- In a familiar passage many of you have memorized, writing to the church at Philippi, The Apostle Paul writes, **do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."**
- We need the Lord's help guarding our hearts. **The truth is, we cannot guard our hearts without him!**
- **Through the Spirit and Word of God, those who trust in the Lord are given grace to guard their hearts!**
- **We need what the Lord Jesus promises in John 4. I believe this passage relates to our text in Proverbs 4. The heart is the wellspring from which the issues of life flow. It is the reservoir that contains either clean or dirty water. The Lord Jesus promised the woman at the well in Samaria water that would never make her thirsty again! Of course, he was NOT referring to physical water. He spoke of the Holy Spirit and having a heart right before God.**
- John 14:14: **"Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life**
- **That is the spring of water you and I need!** That is a pure heart! Do we have this heart? If not, we are in trouble. Our life will reflect the type of heart we have!
- **May the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone is the keeper of the hearts of his people, enable all who love him to hide his Word in their hearts!**

Proverbs Outline - “The Heart of Man”

Proverbs. 4:23 – “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”

The Importance of the “Heart”

- “Above all else” (NIV)
- Defined – “Inner man”
- Proverbs. many descriptors of the heart: heavy (12:25), sick (13:12), merry (15:13), proud (16:5), wise (16:21), hard (28:14) etc.
- Matthew 15:18
- “Citadel of man, the seat of his dearest treasure.”

The Problem of the “Heart”

- Proverbs. 20:7-9 “Who can say....”
- Romans 3:23: “All have sinned.....”
- The “Righteous” a “blameless heart?” - Prov. 24:16
- Jeremiah 17:9 - “Deceitful above all things and beyond cure”

The Solution for the “Heart”

- Wisdom
- Proverbs. 22:17 -19
- “Trust in the Lord” – Prov. 3:5, 22:19, 28:25, 29:25, 30:5
- I Corinthians 1:30: “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us **wisdom from God**, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,”
- The Gospel in Proverbs.

The Duty to Guard the “Heart”

- Language of “sanctification” – Growing as a Christian.
- I Corinthians 16:13
- The heart as a water reservoir
- Access, “pipes” to the heart – Eyes, mouth, feet
- John 4:14 – “The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

The “Heart” in Proverbs

My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your **heart** keep my commandments” (Prov. 3:1).

“Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your **heart**.” (Prov. 3:3)

“Trust in the Lord with all your **heart**, and do not lean on your own understanding.” (Prov. 3:5).

“He taught me and said to me, “Let your **heart** hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live.” (Prov. 4:4).

“Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your **heart**.” (Prov. 4:21).

“Keep your **heart** with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” (Prov. 4:23).

“Do not desire her beauty in your **heart**, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes;” (Prov. 6:25).

“Let not your **heart** turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths” (Prov. 7:25).

“The wise of **heart** will receive commandments, but a babbling fool will come to ruin.” (Prov. 10:8).

“Those of crooked **heart** are an abomination to the Lord, but those of blameless ways are his delight.” (Prov. 11:20).

“Anxiety in a man’s **heart** weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.” (Prov. 12:25).

“Hope deferred makes the **heart** sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.” (Prov. 13:12).

“The **heart** knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy.” (Prov. 14:10).

“Even in laughter, the **heart** may ache, and the end of joy may be grief.” (Prov. 14:13).

“The backslider in **heart** will be filled with the fruit of his ways, and a good man will be filled with the fruit of his ways.” (Prov. 14:14).

“A tranquil **heart** gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.” (Prov. 14:30).

“Wisdom rests in the **heart** of a man of understanding, but it makes itself known even in the midst of fools.” (Prov. 14:33)